

TEAM Westport
2003-2005 Report

June, 2005

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Background

In February 2003, the First Selectwoman convened a Taskforce on Diversity comprised of 14 residents from Westport and Weston. That taskforce was focused on issues of racial, ethnic, and religious diversity, with particular emphasis on the environment for current and future residents outside the traditional majority in each of those categories.

To establish a common sense of history, understanding, and trust among the participants, the Taskforce used a “study circle” process. That process was led by Professors Lari Mazon and Cynthia Swift of Fairfield University. Embedded within the process was extensive deliberation and discussion regarding the Westport/Weston environment, what needed to be addressed, and which approaches might be most appropriate. To a person, each of the original participants found the educational impact of the process to be far greater than anything we had anticipated. In addition, the bonding facilitated by the study circle process helped us gradually build a set of focused recommendations with increasing trust and confidence.

As a result, at the conclusion of the Taskforce in May 2003, its participants unanimously recommended that an on-going Town committee (to be called **TEAM (Together Effectively Achieving Multiculturalism) Westport**) be established to “bring together diverse members of the Westport/Weston community to learn from one another, ... analyze issues,evaluate options, and ...recommend specific actions to achieve and celebrate a more welcoming, multicultural Westport/Weston community.”

Specifically, the Taskforce recommended the following initial structure and focus for TEAM Westport:

- **Recommended Focus**
 - Race / Ethnicity
 - Religion
 - Sexual orientation
- **Recommended Structure**
 - Program Committee
 - Community-building events, programming and networks
 - Youth, schools programming
 - Outreach Committee:
 - Diversity-related cultural, social and faith-based programs
 - Business and government organizations
 - Regional partnerships including faith communities
 - Marketing:
 - Developing and implementing an effective plan and infrastructure to
 - celebrate the diversity within the Westport/Weston community
 - promote a positive, welcoming image of Westport/Weston
 - increase awareness of events within the community which might bring people of diverse cultures together

The Taskforce also recommended the following approach:

- Leverage opportunities to promote diversity and multiculturalism by sponsoring or co-sponsoring events that help educate the community about such issues
- Continuous improvement: *Listen -> Learn -> Act -> Adjust*
- Make programming, initiatives
 - fun for the members of TEAM Westport
 - enticing, compelling for the community

The First Selectwoman accepted all recommendations of the Taskforce and established TEAM Westport as an official Town of Westport Committee in June 2003. All 14 Westport/Weston members of the Taskforce were named as initial members of TEAM Westport.

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Report –June, 2003 thru December, 2004

TEAM Westport has already had a significant impact on the Westport/Weston community. As described below, from June 2003 to December 2004, TEAM Westport hosted or sponsored over 30 different program, outreach, marketing, and education initiatives. TEAM Westport also expanded its ranks to 21 members and modified its structure by adding two more committees:

- Education Committee: Youth, Schools programming
- Governance and Business Committee: Business and Government organizations

TEAM Westport officers and other members currently include the following:

Diane Farrell-First Selectwoman, Harold Bailey-Chair, Ivan Fong-Vice Chair, Rita Ghei-Treasurer, Lisa Freidland– Secretary, Cheryl Scott-Daniels-Marketing Committee Chair, Harold Bailey (acting)-Outreach Committee Chair, Wafaa Naggar -Program Committee Chair, Barbara Butler-Education Committee Chair, Al Puchala-Governance Committee Chair, Bernicestine McLeod Bailey, Floyd McCoy, Steve Daniels, Dan Woog, Craig Polite , Amy Meyerson, Nick Rudd, Glenn Lau-Kee, Jose Estabil, David Wiltse, and Stu Loessen,

Through extensive planning and continuous improvement, TEAM committees developed and implemented the following initiatives:

• **Program Initiatives**

“Old Settler”

Co-sponsored a public talkback session with the Westport Country Playhouse following the production of this play set in 1940's Harlem

“The Good German”

Co-sponsored a panel discussion with the Anti-Defamation League at Temple Israel with a focus on TEAM Westport member David Wiltse's play, which took place in late 1930's Germany.

JUNE Day 2004

Co-sponsored and hosted Hospitality Event for participating families at Compo Beach.

La Amistad

Sponsored a free family event for Westport & Weston residents including ship tours, historical speakers, food and entertainment during the recent Stamford visit of the historic slave ship ***La Amistad***. Was also part of Juneteenth 2004 celebration.

“The Laramie Project”

Co-sponsored a public discussion with the Community Theater following its recent production.

Westport Reads 2003

Participated in community discussions during Westport's 2003 reading of Pete Hamill's "Snow in August"

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• **Program Initiatives (cont'd)**

Westport Reads 2004

"When The Emperor Was Divine"- participated in lecture discussion with survivors of WWII Japanese Internment; held TEAM Westport discussion session on the work.

American Camping Association

Members of TEAM Westport participated in ACA Convention's March, 2004 workshop on multi-culturalism in camping.

T.E.A.M. Leadership Award

Established an award, presented by TEAM Westport Chair, Harold Bailey, at the First Selectwoman's 2004 Annual Town Meeting. The award was presented on behalf of the town of Westport in recognition of projects or actions that support multiculturalism. Coleytown Middle School teachers Michael Pisseri and Paul Ferrante as well as Westport Postmaster Ralph Morrel jointly received the 2004 award for a postage stamp project celebrating the Negro Baseball Leagues. In addition, each of the students participating in the project received certificates of recognition from the First Selectwoman and TEAM Westport.

On-going Dialogue with National Leaders

Met with Brown University President Dr. Ruth Simmons. Luncheon meeting with Tuskegee Airman Lt. Col. (Ret.) Lee Archer.

Presented Books from TEAM Westport to Westport Public Library

On Veteran's Day-2004, Col. Lee Archer (Ret.) – Legendary Tuskegee Airman, heavily decorated fighter pilot, and WWII hero spoke to and fielded questions from the Westport Public Library staff. In addition, he presented on behalf of TEAM Westport a number of copies of works focused on the Tuskegee Airmen. Prior to this presentation, the Library had no copies of works focused on the Airmen. Col. Archer's appearance was enabled by TEAM Westport.

'Who's Your Neighbor?' Series

Launched "Who's Your Neighbor " Town Discussion Series which will eventually engage Town participants in discussion and reflection on various topics in the arenas of race, religion, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. The initial discussion held on May 24 focused on perceptions and assumptions surrounding religion.

• **Outreach Initiatives**

Interfaith Council

Engaged in on-going activities and planning with members of the faith-based community regarding multicultural issues.

Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport

Assisting in planning and training for leadership of "Towards A More Perfect Union" study circles, held in October 2004.

Iftar on Ramadan

Attended Iftar on Ramadan with American Institute for Islamic and Arabic Studies

Brown vs Board of Education

Coordinated Ringing of Church Bells in Westport on 50th Anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

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• **Outreach Initiatives (cont'd)**

SHOAH Project

Co-sponsored with the Westport Public library and area UJA/Federation. Events and programming surrounding the presentation and acceptance of the SHOAH Project videotapes by the Westport public Library. May 17 event focused on ways in which the uniqueness of the Holocaust is relevant to current events and current policies

• **Marketing Initiatives**

Developed www.TEAMWestport.org (a link to www.westportct.org). It includes multicultural events, multi-lingual medical care providers, diverse religious institutions, organizations and retailers offering ethnic specialties. Also includes a printable brochure highlighting Westport as a desirable place for all people to live and raise a family.

Westport Sunrise Rotary's Forbidden Westport

Team Westport members participated in skit as part of Forbidden Westport.

ON-going Media Communications / Relationship

Including media communications and coverage of all key events, programs and initiatives.

• **Education Initiatives**

Westport Board of Education

Met with Board of Education, who incorporated an action plan in its 2003 Goals to work with TEAM Westport regarding implementation of the diversity tenets in their "Schools of the Future" plan.

Lynne Shain (2004)

Full TEAM Westport met with Lynne Shain, Westport Schools' Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Professional Development. Focus was Westport Schools' background, strategy and plans regarding diversity. Areas of collaboration were also discussed.

Staples High School US History Classes

Arranged for members and others who attended segregated schools to meet with one 11th & all 10th grade classes studying the landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, during its 50th anniversary. Objective was to share and discuss their life experiences during that period.

Col Archer at Westport Schools - Veteran's Day

On Veteran's Day-2004, Col. Lee Archer (Ret.) – Legendary Tuskegee Airman, heavily decorated fighter pilot, and WWII hero spoke to and fielded questions from hundreds of middle school students at Coleytown Middle School. In addition, he had similar interaction with dozens of students at Bedford Middle School. His appearance and participation was enabled by TEAM Westport.

PTA Council Mtg 2004

Held meeting with the PTA Council to introduce Team Westport background/plans and discuss potential areas of collaboration.

Gift to Westport Schools

Presented Books, Art & Photos regarding the Tuskegee Airmen to Westport Schools.

Social Studies Curriculum

Planning meeting with Westport Schools Middle School Social Studies Curriculum Leadership Team.

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• **Education Initiatives (cont'd)**

'Open Choice'

Meetings with Westport 'Open Choice' coordinator and several students from the program.

"Complicity"

Distributed the Hartford Courant's "Complicity" publication to Westport Schools' Social Studies curriculum team and Saugatuck Church Diversity Project participants.

Hyla Crane

Director of Education for Westport Country Playhouse, Hyla Crane met with TEAM Westport to discuss the Playhouse's "Cootie Shots" initiative and its impact on Westport and surrounding communities.

Prudence Crandall

Co-sponsored with ADL, Temple Israel, Westport Schools, Westport PTAs and Westport/Weston Clergy. 8th grade student/parent viewing and discussion of one-woman play during January 2005.

Westport Schools Administration Review & Planning (Early 2005)

Education Committee met with Lynne Shain and Mary Lou Huisking in early 2005 to get feedback, review status of initiatives, and plan for follow-on programming.

TEAM Westport Staples Scholarships

Launched the annual awarding of TEAM Westport Staples Scholarships to 1 or more seniors whose leadership, personal involvement and high standards of service have most significantly advanced the engagement and understanding of the Staples Community with respect to diversity in the combined areas of race, ethnicity/religion and sexual orientation. Named 2 awardees in June, 2005 with scholarships of \$500 each.

• **Governance & Business Initiatives**

Grassroots TEAM Westport

This Committee is leading the planning and structuring of a grassroots TEAM Westport which could enable and leverage programming and initiatives on an extended basis at the individual and neighborhood levels.

Meeting with Police Chief Fiore

At Chief Fiore's request, he and TEAM Westport publicly discussed the Westport Police Department's history and current procedures, programs and initiatives surrounding diversity as well as minority perceptions and concerns.

Norwalk Town Mtg re: No Child Left Behind

Harold Bailey represented TEAM Westport as a respondent in the December 2004 Norwalk-based Regional Town meeting on 'No Child Left Behind' and its impact on area schools.

Input to Town of Wilton

The First Selectwoman and TEAM Westport provided input and guidance to Wilton on our programs, initiatives and plans surrounding diversity. First Selectman Paul Hannah and Selectman Richard Creeth attended several of TEAM Westport's meetings in order to get a greater understanding of our modus operandi. Wilton embarked upon a set of its own initiatives following the involvement with TEAM Westport.

Col Archer as honored guest at Westport Veteran's Day celebration

Col. Lee Archer (Ret.) – Legendary Tuskegee Airman, heavily decorated fighter pilot, and WWII hero was an honored guest and speaker at Westport's 2004 Veteran's Day ceremony at Town Hall. His appearance and participation was enabled by TEAM Westport.

Presented Art and photos autographed by Col Archer to VFW

Art and photos were provided to the Westport VFW by TEAM Westport.

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Looking Forward

No one could reasonably argue that as a Town posture, Westport should be a town in which only white people of a Judeo-Christian background should be residents and feel welcome to live. To the contrary, the very essence of what Westport, the State of Connecticut and the nation stand for demand that we make our town one in which people of all backgrounds, cultures and sexual orientations are welcomed and embraced.

In effect, Westport's history is laced with examples of leadership among its peers in striving to make real the promise of equality and equal opportunity for all its residents. According to author and longtime resident , Woody Klein in his work **"Westport, Connecticut: The Story of a New England Town's Rise to Prominence"** , such examples date as far back as the mid- to late-1700s and extend into the twenty-first century with Team Westport as the most recent chapter in this progression.

To the extent that the perception that Westport is an un-welcoming place for diversity is an unfair one, the fault for the misperception may be driven by its racial, ethnic and sexual orientation compositions. Less than 6% of the Town's population is African-American, Latino, or Asian-American combined. A far smaller percentage than that is associated with a religion that is not Christian or Jewish. And, in addition, the number of same sex couples is smaller than either of the prior groups and seems to be far fewer proportionally than can be found in major metropolitan areas. It is both possible and likely that one can walk the length of Main St. at any given time and not encounter a person who is apparently from one of the aforementioned minority groups.

Those conditions and their attendant perceptions are similar to those of other affluent towns in lower Fairfield County, Connecticut. What is unusual about Westport is that in establishing and supporting TEAM Westport, it is taking the proactive step of addressing these issues in a way that is meaningful, reflective of the Town's culture, and increasingly intrinsic to the fabric of the community.

It is against this backdrop that TEAM Westport recently assessed the environment for and key challenges to making the Town of Westport fully welcoming to diversity and multiculturalism.

Environment

The following are key elements of TEAM Westport's assessment of the historic and current environments for diversity and multiculturalism in Westport.

- Westport would benefit from more residents with diverse backgrounds.
- Our comfortable way of life here masks uncomfortable issues such as prejudicial perceptions which might sometimes result in prejudicial attitudes and behaviors.
- Behavior based on stereotypes has been present in most institutions to some degree, at some times and has had a cumulative impact over time.
- Generally, existing channels, forums, organizations and mechanisms do not address multiculturalism and diversity centrally as an integral part of the core of their missions.
- By establishing and supporting TEAM Westport, the Town has taken a major step forward in proactively addressing the above conditions.
- In addition to TEAM Westport as a Town committee, a complementary, external grassroots organization leveraging existing assets in the community would be the likely vehicle for most effectively addressing all of the above conditions.

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Key Challenges

1. Ensure that awareness, concern and conversation regarding diversity and multiculturalism are part of the fabric of the Westport community.
2. Eliminate 'negative assumptions' that Westporters of diverse backgrounds don't live here and are not welcome here.
3. Enable children in the Community to grow up with an expanded view of social reality - prepared to embrace the diverse world outside Westport.
4. Enable the views, attitudes and concerns of children of diverse backgrounds to be nurtured, respected and encouraged to ensure their growth as healthy human beings.
5. Ensure that Westporters of diverse backgrounds have facile access to the informal networks which allow them to leverage the key benefits of the community.
6. Provide teachers and other employees from outside the community the clear understanding that Westport neither prefers nor expects a lack of diversity.
7. Effectively address history and perception of profiling in Westport among people of diverse backgrounds.
8. Expand perspectives and directions of community organizations and institutions to embrace the needs of non-majority populations, e.g., language, food, preferred activities , hair care, etc.
9. Encourage organizations and institutions to include as part of their conversations and mindsets the establishment of explicit goals for diversity/multiculturalism and/or standards against which to measure change.
10. Establish effective forum and mechanisms for addressing issues of diversity such that multiculturalism may be effectively achieved, celebrated and extended from individual thru Town levels.

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Future Plans for 2005

TEAM Westport will continue to extend its efforts according to the recommended principles and approach of its charter and evolution to date. Working with members of the Representative Town Meeting, TEAM Westport hopes to be added to the list of officially recognized and appointed Town committees. While each of the Committees will continue to move forward with an integrated set of programs and initiatives, our primary new thrust will be the development and roll-out of a grassroots TEAM Westport organization that is external to the Town Committee, but highly complementary and supportive of its mission at the individual and neighborhood levels. It is through such a vehicle that we can most effectively achieve the cultural and thought synergy to enable Westport to achieve and extend over time its long term goal of being fully welcoming to all. .

TEAM Westport applauds the Town of Westport for its encouragement and support. At both individual and group levels, TEAM Westport pledges to the First Selectwoman and the Town of Westport its commitment to helping Westport achieve its goals for diversity and multi-culturalism.

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APPENDIX 1:			
TEAMWESTPORT ACCOUNTS - 2004			
	Events		
	AMISTAD	jUNe DAY	Total
	\$	\$	\$
<u>Expenditures</u>			
Stamford Center for the Arts	5000.00		5000.00
Caterers	1800.00		1800.00
Stamford Tent & Party Rental	85.86		85.86
Diego Chachques	600.00		600.00
Banners	79.00		79.00
Refreshments		135.86	135.86
Total Expenditures	7564.86	135.86	7700.72
<u>Receipts</u>			
Betty Sheffer Foundation	5000.00		5000.00
Andrew Tobias	1000.00		1000.00
Main St. Resources	1000.00		1000.00
Harold & Bernicetine Bailey	400.00		400.00
Sub-total Income from Sponsorships	7400.00		7400.00
Contributions by TEAMWESTPORT	164.86		164.86
Town of Westport		135.86	135.86
Total Revenue	7564.86	135.86	7700.72

The income statement above relates to two events sponsored by TeamWestport- jUNeDay and La Amistad.

For jUNe Day, TEAM co-sponsored and hosted a hospitality event for UN families at Compo Beach for which the Town incurred expenditures on refreshments for \$135.86.

La Amistad was a town wide event attended by over 150 Westport/Weston adults and children. The total cost of the event was \$7564.86. This free family event stuck a note with the community leading to sponsorships of \$7400 from four sponsors-Betty Scheffer (\$5000), Andrew Tobias (\$1000), Main Resources (\$1000), and Harold & Bernicestine Bailey (\$400). Team Westport made a contribution of \$164.86. Families from Westport & Weston were treated to an exclusive tour of La AMISTAD, its history, music, food, and entertainment. The event highlighted the conditions under which slaves were brought to the US on the ship-La Amistad. It was a part of the 2004 celebration of Juneteenth.